

INTRODUCTION

Afrikaans can best be characterized as a contact variety of Dutch, a member of the West-Germanic branch of Indo-European. The language has its origins in two types of Dutch: (a) the 17th/18th-century Hollandic Dutch dialect of the European immigrants of the Cape Colony (starting with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck and others in 1652), and (b) the restructured (pidgin and Creole) varieties of Dutch spoken by their slaves and the local Khoekhoen (starting with the latter's Pidgin Dutch, which has its roots before 1652). Afrikaans still shares a couple of basic (Continental West-Germanic) syntactic features with Dutch. On the other hand it is characterized by certain L2 acquisition phenomena, almost complete deflexion in the verb and lexical and syntactic influences from Asian Creole Portuguese, non-standard Malay and Khoekhoe (once known as "Hottentot"). Due to its dialectal origins, but also due to relexification from Dutch during the standardization phase, Afrikaans is clearly related to modern standard Dutch, which is also partly Hollandic in origin. Therefore, it is not impossible to call Afrikaans a West-Germanic language, but the label "Semi-Creole" [i.e. partly restructured West-Germanic] is about as adequate.

From the late 18th century onwards Afrikaans spread to the rest of South Africa and to Namibia, partly through the treks of various Europeanized Khoekhoe groups and partly through the Great Trek across the Orange River of white farmers and their "Coloured" servants. It has been a literary language for a little over a century. At present, it is spoken by about 6 million people.

The language was originally known as Kaaps Hollands [i.e. Cape Dutch] or Afrikaans Hollands [i.e. African Dutch]. The designation 'Afrikaans' [literally: African] was adopted towards the end of the nineteenth century. From 1910 till 1925, Dutch and English were the joint official languages of the Union of South Africa; in 1925 Afrikaans replaced Dutch. In post-Apartheid South Africa English and Afrikaans are just two out of the eleven national languages (besides isi-Zulu, isi-Xhosa, se-Tswana, etc.), although at the national level English clearly serves as the lingua franca. The use of Afrikaans is mainly characteristic of the West Cape and North Cape provinces, parts of the Free State, and areas across the Vaal River.

- Prof. Hans den Besten